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Graduate Student Dissonance: Graduate Students of Color in a U. S. Research University

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This qualitative investigation examined the experiences of a population of graduate students—graduate students of color—in a U. S. research university (a) to indicate reasons for their dilemmas, ambiguities, and decisions about choosing an academic career, and (b) to identify the practices of one research university's graduate programs that have considerable influence upon graduate students' decisions about pursuing an academic career. For graduate students of color, professional and social identity alignment is a significant condition for decisions about academic career choices, and the institution's norms and behavioral patterns have considerable influence on graduate students' experiences and career choices.

Keywords: graduate students, career choice, social identity

U. S. scholarship on graduate students' career choices has relied upon processes of socialization to explain both completion rates and academic career choices. More recent scholarship has addressed gender as a particularly salient variable for both completion and career choice and the import of work and family balance in academic careers (Gardner, 2007, 2008; Quinn & Litzler, 2009; Sallee, 2011a, 2011b). Yet, with some exceptions (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Haley, Jaeger, & Levin, in press; Winkle-Wagner, Johnson, Morelon-Quainoo, & Santiague, 2010), race/ethnicity has been overlooked in explanations. Outside of the United States there is the suggestion that considerable stratification exists by race/ethnicity and class in graduate student demographics (Harvey & Andrewartha, 2012; Wakeling & Kyriacou, 2010). U.S. scholarship is limited in emphasizing the influence of race/ethnicity on graduate experiences or race/ethnicity as a variable in academic career choices. Yet there are concerns about the demographic makeup of faculty, specifically that the faculty of universities and colleges do not reflect the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the students they teach and supervise—at either the undergraduate or graduate levels (Denecke, Frasier, & Redd, 2009).

Given their relatively low numbers in graduate programs and in faculty ranks, and given that the career path for faculty is through graduate programs at research universities, our focus is on graduate students of color—those classified as underrepresented minority populations. The research university is a numerically small percentage of all colleges and universities in the United States—with 197 institutions classified in this category by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and 108 of these categorized as RU/VH (very high research activity)—but it serves as the primary preparation site and provider of future academics, researchers, and college teachers. Although just over a majority of doctoral students may give serious consideration to a professorial role as a faculty member as a career aspiration (M. A. Mason & Goulden, 2006), only 27% of women and 36%

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of men, at the conclusion of their graduate program, acknowledge that they plan to pursue a faculty role entailing research for a career, in part due to the working life of faculty in these institutions. Instead, they are also attracted to teaching institutions (27% women; 19% men). Although gender accounts for some gaps (Quinn & Litzler, 2009), there is little explanation for the shortage of graduate students of color who choose a career in academia. Full-time faculty of color (African American, Hispanic, Native American) in universities and colleges are 10.6% of the total, and in specific science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, these populations represent a much lower percentage, such as 9.5% biological sciences, 8.5% engineering, and 6.8% physical sciences (U. S. Department of Education, 2011).

Although low numbers of minority faculty have been attributed to low numbers of minority students enrolling in doctoral programs, such a claim is not validated by empirical evidence. One argument is that if doctoral programs focused on the program completion of students, the leaky pipeline of underrepresented minorities would be repaired and the numbers of faculty of color would increase (Denecke et al., 2009). According to the U.S. Survey of Earned Doctorates, the number of minority doctoral recipients between 1996 and 2006 increased by 45%. Between 1986 and 2006, the number of domestic U.S. students earning doctorates increased as well: Hispanics by 140% and Blacks by 101% (Denecke et al., 2009). Yet increases in doctoral degree attainment are not sufficient and have not been reflected in faculty placement, which suggests that these new doctoral recipients are choosing career paths alternate to the professoriate (Haley et al., in press).

Academic career choice for underrepresented minority graduate students is complicated by the cultural and social barriers these students may experience. Although students enter graduate school with a specific career or profession in mind, they modify career choices as a result of their graduate school experiences (Haley et al., in press; M. A. Mason & Goulden, 2006). Socialization theory has been used to explain the process by which students become inculcated into their roles as graduate students, researchers, teachers, and future faculty members (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Austin, 2002; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), but does not address the cultural characteristics of underrepresented minority graduate students and the implications of these characteristics (Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, & Salazar, 2009). Indeed, although research is beginning to determine the effects of graduate school, socialization, and labor market conditions on the shaping of the career identity development of graduate students (Lindholm, 2004), the reasons for these effects for students of color are not elucidated. Social identity theory (SIT) offers insights into how students do or do not identify with academia and the effects of this identification, or its absence, on career choices (Jaeger, Haley, & Levin, 2010). However, aside from one or two recent articles, there is little to indicate what specifically shapes this identification with the academy for graduate students of color and leads them (or not) to make their career choices to be an academic professional based upon their graduate student experiences.

Purpose

This qualitative investigation examines the experiences of a population of graduate students—graduate students of color—in a U.S. research university (a) to indicate reasons for their dilemmas, ambiguities, and decisions about choosing an academic career, and (b) to identify the practices and behaviors of a university's graduate programs that have considerable influence upon graduate students' decisions about pursuing an academic career.

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theoretical perspectives guide this investigation. Costello's (2005) concept of *dissonance* and the related, but contrasting, concept *assonance* inform the analysis of data. For graduate students of color, assonance indicates an alignment of student self-represented identity and personal aspirations with the practices of a graduate program, including the behaviors of academics, whereas dissonance suggests a misalignment. Although we address career choice and the specific reasons for this choice, Costello uses the concepts of cognitive dissonance and assonance as predictors of student persistence in graduate professional school. Costello argues that race, class, and gender are the critical vari-

ables in the completion of graduate professional programs: If the practices and behaviors within programs are in alignment with the social identity of a student (by race, class, or gender, or a combination of these), then that student will persist and complete the program. We use assonance and dissonance as a form of person–environment fit (Kristof, 1996). For example, we address the congruence between a graduate student and their graduate program, including other graduates students, faculty, and the program of study. Within this framework, there are subcategories of congruence, such as *supplementary* and *complementary* (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987), but without congruence, in Costello's sense of assonance based upon identification of students with a career, there is a lack of fit and thus considerable potential for avoidance of a career that is promoted by a program.

Although dissonance and assonance are foregrounded as theoretical concepts that inform this investigation, institutional theoretical perspectives (Scott, 2001) serve as background. Institutional patterns of behavior, such as practices aimed at the preparation of graduate students (e.g., laboratory duties), and taken-for-granted assumptions (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Scott, 2001), such as professional aspirations of faculty for their graduate students, are among those manifestations of organizational framing and shaping of students' experiences. Institutions socialize their members, as well as future members, in terms of behaviors that perpetuate the values and purposes of the institution; in so doing, they help to sustain the institution.

The university itself and the type of university, as well as the disciplines, serve as a structuring device for the behaviors of faculty and students (Clark, 1987), with the result of homogeneity within the categories of university type, disciplines, and respective behaviors of faculty and students. Thus, professors in disciplinary fields at a research university exhibit common behaviors within their fields as a result of normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), such as adherence to disciplinary standards in subjects and methodologies (Clark, 1987), and, more recently, to academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), such as the pursuit of funded research grants to denote legitimacy and generate revenues. That is, what faculty members investigate is legitimized, sanctioned, reinforced, and, thus, reproduced. These professors and the disciplinary and institutional structures of their profession serve as powerful socializing devices for their graduate students (Austin, 2002). Thus, graduate students whose values or behaviors or both place them outside these norms would experience dissonance.

A third theoretical orientation, critical race theory (CRT), is used in the analysis of data, particularly in the understanding of students' perspectives and institutional actions directed at students. CRT provides a framework for evaluating the influence of institutional norms and policies and their interactions with graduate students of color. CRT assumes that racial inequalities are replicated within student bodies of an institution, even though institutions claim they value diversity and equality (Fenelon, 2003). This is because CRT holds that racism is ingrained in the majority culture and is reinforced in everyday interactions (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009). CRT recognizes the power of the dominant culture and its ability to define norms—a power not granted to minority cultures. CRT offers a critical perspective for the analysis of the dominant culture's role in creating racial and ethnic inequalities as well as all attempts to decrease those inequalities (Diggs et al., 2009). CRT has been used to convey how minority undergraduate students experience predominantly White campuses (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Torres & Mitchell, 1998; Villalpando, 2004). Within graduate education, the theory provides a context to understand the experiences, socialization process, and career choices of graduate student of color (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Finally, SIT is used to clarify the self-concepts of graduate students of color. SIT posits that, in their interactions, individuals pursue a positive self-concept and that individuals seek groups that will increase their self-concept. Individuals' identification with social groups is a part of individual identity (Tafjel, 1978; Tafjel & Turner, 1985). Social identity includes the aspects of an individual's self-image derived from the social categories to which the individual perceives her or himself as belonging (Tafjel & Turner, 1985). Graduate students of color may reject the future role of a faculty member or a faculty career because of the incongruence

of that role with their developing social identity, or because of social preferences, such as family or community (Gardner, 2008; Quinn & Litzler, 2009). In order to aspire to a role as a university or college faculty member, these students may be obligated to reject their social identity group (Haley et al., in press; Taifel & Turner, 1985).

The combination of person–environment fit (i.e., assonance and dissonance), institutional theory (e.g., taken for granted assumptions), CRT, and SIT are, on the one hand, analytical tools for categorizing and explaining data. But, on the other hand, this combination has another purpose, which is to begin the reconceptualization and retheorization of the research university as a place for academic professionals of color. Thus, assonance and dissonance are key frameworks for determining whether or not, and the extent to which, the research university can be an organizational home for this population.

The Research Questions

Two exploratory questions guide this investigation, following from the purpose of the investigation and the theoretical frameworks:

1. What are reasons and explanations for the career choices of graduate students of color?
2. What institutional practices and behaviors shape their career decisions?

Method

To address our research questions, we relied upon a methodology that would both articulate the perceptions and reflect the lived experiences of graduate students of color as well as tie our theoretical orientations to the collected data. We follow an interpretive/phenomenological tradition, "concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted" (J. Mason, 2002, p. 31). We are concerned about phenomena described and lived by participants (Creswell, 2009). We rely upon qualitative field methods in which the researcher or researchers engage personally at a research site or sites with participants, and are expected to have or gain familiarity with both the site and the participants (Burgess, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 2005). Collected data are primarily emic data (Erickson, 1986) that express the perceptions and understandings of the investigated population. Data include conversational-style interviews (Burgess, 1984) that comprise narratives of graduate students' experiences and explanations of their intended careers. We supplement these data with focus-group data and demographic information about the campus, its students, and its faculty. Furthermore, we collected interview data from faculty and academic administrators (vice provosts, associate deans, and deans) as part of a larger investigation, but used these data as contextual information about the campus and its institutional practices and values. We used a team of researchers both for data collection and data analysis to permit considerable opportunity for multiple perspectives on the data collection and analysis.

The Site

For several reasons, we chose a campus of the University of California. First, for the purposes of access, an important component of data collection in field methods research, one of the principal investigators was a faculty member at this institution, and thus there was a high level of accessibility both to the site and to information about the site. One of the university's deans agreed to act as a host for the project on campus. This site provided us with unimpeded access to both organizational members and to the institution's documents and records. Second, a recent survey of University of California graduate students (M. A. Mason & Goulden, 2006) and its results were available, showing that these students were not selecting research university faculty careers at the level expected. Reports from this study did not indicate that race/ethnicity was considered in the survey or in the discussion of results. Third, and finally, the selected campus possessed features that were theoretically aligned with the investigation's purposes.

The campus was a public, comprehensive, high-research-activity university, with an ethnically diverse undergraduate population of 15,000 (80% underrepresented minority [URM]) and graduate population of 2,000 (23.8% URM, 34.8% international students). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, classified this as a research university with "very high research activity. "Approx-

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imately 242 graduate students identified as Latino, African American, or Native American; 227 students identified as Asian; and 772 identified as Caucasian. Graduate degrees are offered in engineering, humanities (arts and social sciences), natural and agricultural sciences, management, and education. Three members of the research team were either faculty ($n = 1$) or graduate students ($n = 2$) at the institution.

Participant Selection

AQ: 26 We selected participants through a variety of techniques in order to ensure a broad sample. Selection of the graduate students began with an electronic mail communication sent to all graduate students that explained our planned investigation and solicited their participation. Those who were interested in participating followed a link to a short demographic survey and an e-mail contact, and were scheduled for individual interview times by the research team. A second e-mail message was sent to all graduate students to solicit additional participants. To encourage broad participation, we contacted the graduate student faculty advisor in each university department. We asked them to embed our invitational text in an e-mail message to graduate students of color in their respective departments. Our intent was to expand the network of participants (Merriam, 2009). Once we interviewed students, we asked them for names of other graduate students who might be interested in participating in the project—a form of snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Although self-selection by the participants may have influenced the overall results, each participant gave of their time and conveyed their experiences without reward. Our interest was in information-rich narratives (Patton, 2002) within a context of voluntary disclosure. Although students of color were our focus, and their experiences our unit of analysis, we interviewed students classified as White as well as those classified as international in order to contextualize both graduate student experience generally and to determine if race/ethnicity was salient to these populations.

Data Collection Methods

Semistructured interviews were the primary method of data collection for our investigation. These interviews enabled us to explore the experiences of graduate students based on their perspectives (Fontana & Frey, 2000). A total of 26 graduate students of color were interviewed. The sample of students self-identified as Asian AQ: 27 American ($n = 2$), Black/African American ($n = 5$), Hispanic/Chicano/a ($n = 9$), Native American ($n = 1$), and Multiracial ($n = 9$). This latter category underlines the rationale for our use of the term *graduate students of color*. This population of 26 did not include international students. The participants pursued graduate degrees in education ($n = 3$), engineering ($n = 5$), AQ: 28 science ($n = 8$), and humanities, arts, and social sciences ($n = 10$). The data collection strategy was to seek out narratives that provided personalized accounts of the graduate program experience, with attention to career choices. Investigators asked specific questions of participants (e.g., "Tell me about how you have come to be at this point in your career?"), but then explored participants' responses (Seidman, 1998). The researchers addressed the sociocultural context of graduate education that influenced academic career choices, and thus researchers were attentive to signals from participants based upon unobtrusive exploration of issues of ethnic identities (e.g., "You have talked about some of the influences on your career decision making, but you haven't addressed the effects of gender, race, or ethnicity: Can you talk about any of those factors?").

To complement our interviews, we held several focus group sessions with 10 students to explore specific issues, such as race relations, identified during the individual interviews. The focus groups were designed to offer the most comfortable environment for students to interact with each other and potentially build on each other's responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 2009). Each focus group lasted 1 hr and was led by a research team member, while a second team member took notes and observed in order to gain accurate and substantial data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Research Credibility

Our approach relied upon a team of researchers—graduate students and university faculty—to collect data and analyze data. Although the majority of interviews were conducted by two principal investigators who were university faculty members from other universities, three graduate

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students participated, with two graduate students of color conducting several interviews, both with international students and students of color. Three university faculty—two females and one male, all White—undertook data analysis, but were assisted by two female graduate students and one male graduate student, one of whom was African American. Research team members interacted with each other constantly throughout four separate site visits for data collection and during data analysis. They compared perceptions, checked the data acquired, refined data collection techniques, and proposed explanations of behaviors. Finally, over a prolonged period of several months, three of the research team faculty members communicated via electronic mail and met once in person. Furthermore, graduate students transcribed verbatim all recorded interviews. Such an approach to data collection and data analysis was intended to ensure credibility of the research process and its findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Display and Analysis

Data were analyzed using the overarching framework of assonance and dissonance. Institutional theory, CRT, and SIT served as subsets of the assonance/dissonance framework. This approach, for example, enabled the identification of institutional norms and practices experienced by graduate students (institutional theory) that were aligned or misaligned with their social identities (CRT and SIT).

AQ: 29 Interview data were analyzed and categorized to provide evidence that could support answers to the research questions. The categories included specific career aspirations (e.g., faculty, administrator, researcher); when obvious, the specific location of their career aspiration (e.g., research university, teaching-oriented university, government laboratory); and the examples of assonance or dissonance, or both, that are reflected in their experiences as graduate students. From this approach, we categorized and reduced data further and organized these data into themes that gave conceptual coherence to these data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The themes we developed included (a) rejection of a faculty career (The Faculty Role is not Inviting), (2) the significance of racial identity as a contributing factor in graduate students' career choice (Does Race Matter?), (3) the significance of gender—female identity—as a contributing factor in graduate students' career choice (Does Gender Matter?), (4) institutional characteristics that shape students' experiences and choices (Ambiguities of the Academy), (5) acceptance of a faculty career (The Faculty Role is what I Want), and (6) the conflicts and ambivalence for graduate students of color (Assonance and Dissonance). Graduate students are identified by a pseudonym, to preserve anonymity, and by a general program area, to mask personal identification.

Results AQ:30,31

The findings of this study address both the career choices of graduate students of color as well as institutional practices that shape the career decisions of these students. For graduate students of color, assonance suggests an alignment of student self-represented identity and personal aspirations with the practices of a graduate program, whereas dissonance indicates misalignment. Whereas Costello (2005) uses the concepts of cognitive dissonance and assonance as predictors of student persistence in graduate professional school, we use these as analytical frames for the experiences and career choices of graduate students of color. These findings indicate that, for numerous students, the faculty role was not inviting as a career, even though it was appealing for some, and that race and gender matter as well in both the experiences and decisions of these students. Yet student experiences and decisions were not clear-cut or unambiguous. Both assonance and dissonance were evident in these students' career choices. The condition of dissonance, however, was what deterred them from a faculty career, especially in a research university.

The Faculty Role Is Not Inviting

The rejection of a career as a research university faculty member, and indeed as a faculty member at any type of institution, flowed from graduate students' social identities (Haley et al., in press). At least nine of the 26 participants expressed a preference for a life outside of any educational institution, and five others expressed a disdain for the research university. Thus, over half of our participants did not plan

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to follow the track of their professors. "I just don't want to do the research that has to go with the teaching," noted Lana, in social sciences, who was repelled by the faculty role that is at odds with a family life: "You have to have service, teaching, a record of publications, and so all those things at the same time that you're trying to have a family life, you know, is a little daunting." Andria, an engineering doctoral student, did not view faculty life, with obligations for teaching, as fitting into her career and family plans: "I just think it is going to be too much, especially because I am a single mom too."

For Carl, a master's student in education, teaching students was his aversion. He rejected the academic role in favor of administration largely because of a personal interest in students:

AQ: 32

> I'd rather be learning about the students' stories day to day, checking in with them, "How are you doing? If you have a problem, let's solve the problem. What's going on in your classes?" I'd rather be more of the problem solver rather than seen as their professor.

Wanda, a science doctoral-level student, wanted a faculty career, but in a community college in which teaching is paramount and research is neither a workplace expectation nor a common activity: "I don't want to be put into that whole research competition that goes on in research institutions." It was the university work ethos that dissuaded her from considering a research university faculty career.

Darius, in computing sciences, expressed his sense of isolation as an African American in his PhD program:

> When I started the PhD program there was one other female that was black in the program and that was it. Not having other people like you and having such a large number of international students, there's not really a sense of community.

Although he was not certain whether or not he would pursue a faculty career, he felt that faculty did not take an active role in developing either an academic or social community for graduate students: "Our faculty are out doing their thing and the students are left so they create their own community."

These students indicated that a faculty career as a university researcher was not compatible with family life; that teaching students at a research university might not be desirable when there is little interest, as reflected in both reward structures and time commitment, in the students individually or collectively; and that the competitive nature of the academy at a research-focused institution was not consistent with personal predispositions. These students encountered considerable dissonance in their social identities, both in the present and projected into the future, with a career as a faculty member in a research university. Yet they acknowledged that the faculty career was often the most frequently suggested career option, and the assumption was that an academic career would take place at a research university.

Does Race Matter?

Race serves as a significant component of career choice, but is moderated or shaped by social identity (Haley et al., in press). The absence of role models was compounded for some students of color by their social identities. Carl, an African American master's student in education, wanted to become a university administrator; he eschewed a faculty career in large part because he lacked role models for that kind of work:

> The first teacher I had that was African American was a substitute in high school—that was the first experience. The second experience was a sociology class in my second year at community college: very few Black faculty. I wouldn't really want to do that (faculty job) because I haven't seen that model close enough.

Carl reported that there were no, or few, role models for him, and thus race or ethnicity might matter in his career choice. Lana, in social sciences, also noted the lack of role models, yet she pushed her observations further to encompass the nature of the research university, indicating that the research university does not meet the needs of graduate students of color: "Well it's a big institution, you know and so there's lots of structures there that are not really in place, they don't serve people of color well."

For Marcus, a doctoral student in education, race was a defining and persistent influence for him, both in how he narrated his life-story—"I got out of high school in 1965; the schools were segregated. I went to an all-Black high school with all Black teachers"—and how he viewed graduate school generally. He was active with Latino and Black students on campus both formally and informally, and concluded that the

campus itself was not a conducive environment for students of color:

> It really is difficult because faculty do have different expectations. I've had a couple experiences. It didn't affect me because you know I'm old enough . . . But I've met a lot of younger [students], especially Latinos, who have had negative experiences with professors, saying things to them, that I don't think they should say . . .90% of Latina females, here . . . have low self-esteem . . . and the reason why is the professors never believe in them.

Does Gender Matter?

Other students combined gender with race as explanations for the dissonance they experienced. Danielle planned to find employment in industry, not in academia:

> In my department (in the sciences) there's fewer females than males, but in science in general, and I guess the higher you go toward pursuing the PhD, there tend to be fewer, at least, African American females. And so in way that has actually deterred me because, I mean, sometimes you feel like you're the only one.

Gender was a factor in career choice for female graduate students of color, primarily because of family. That is, family interests and responsibilities influenced, or were a factor in, career choice. Rebecca, in the humanities, clarified the university's priorities—the placing of program over family: "They want her [fellow student] to prioritize school over her family." Yet Rebecca chose a faculty career at a research university over law because, in her understanding, academic life is not all consuming: "I felt that in academia I could leave work at work, whereas law [as an attorney/ public defender] follows you home." In this case, she viewed academic life as consonant with her social identity, which was more gender and less racial in its characteristics: "Just because you have children shouldn't mean you don't get a tenure track job."

Yet there was the countervailing view that the university was not enlightened and that, at a research university, women with children are going to give up family life:

> I feel like my gender plays a huge role in my options because if I did just want to be a researcher and focus on a research question and devote all my time and not be a professor, I can't let myself do that because family to me is more important. (Martina)

In this case, a teaching career at a college was acceptable, but a position in which research was fundamental was unacceptable. Lana, who wanted a faculty career, looked to the community college, where the pressures are less and the job requirements are more consonant with her gender identity:

> Teaching at the community college you don't have the pressure to produce; it's not the pressure to publish all the time . . . I mean my son was three when I started and now he's going to be 10, you know. So all he's ever known is mom in school, and I've always been working so it would be hard. I don't know how I would balance that.

For the majority of women graduate students in this investigation, gender, detached from family, was not a salient factor in career decisions. However, both gender and race combined to dissuade graduate students of color from pursuing a faculty career in science, according to Sarah:

> There is a perception that among some people that faculty is like an old boys' club, and it might be more difficult to succeed if you are different. I don't know any minority grad students who have become professors, personally, and all of my mentors have been White males.

Women of color experience a condition referred to as *double jeopardy* (Turner, 2002). On the one hand, women who have or anticipate children view the research institution as unable to accommodate them in a dual role. On the other hand, graduate students of color expressed the view that there are few examples of faculty of color in the research university, and thus few or no models for them, and also that the institution is not structured appropriately to serve "people of color" in a manner consonant with their needs. Shakina, in the sciences, referred to this as a "double whammy, because I am a woman and I am Black." However, for her, race was a more significant factor: "In terms of the color thing, I have no one to talk to about it so it becomes more of a bigger issue than the gender one."

Ambiguities of the Academy

Not all cases offered clarity on students' choices. Students expressed that the university is not an accommodating or respectful environment for women and people of color. In Rebecca's example, university officials did not respect the social identity of women. Contrastingly, Rebecca acknowledged that the faculty she knew

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and worked with did not exhibit negativity toward her or her life decisions: "The professors are involved and care. I can just pop into their office and talk about my life." In her case, she did not reject an academic life; instead, she indicated that she would choose one that accommodated her, where she "could leave work at work."

In some cases, it was simply academic behaviors, and personal ones at that, that caused students to have an aversion to academic life:

> I look at the professors sometimes who, well there's like two in [the department] that fight each other. I'm like "dude you're almost both 70; it's a job, a profession." . . . The researcher I worked with stated it well . . . "They are so childish toward each other and they fight each other . . . They scream at each other in the hallways."

In the case of Shakina, a science student, she was on the verge of withdrawing from her program when, at a conference, she was confronted with an ideal role model in the form of a Black professor who was giving a presentation, and that incident refocused her career goals:

> I noticed that the people in the crowd weren't looking at him as . . . that smart black professor; it was just that smart professor . . . It was shocking to me and they seemed to respect him from the questions and from the comments that they would give him . . . At the end of the conference . . . I was walking down the hallway . . . and he found me and he [said] "I noticed you in the crowd," cause it is just us and then he was talking to me about his experiences and it was exactly like mine . . . He has the same kind of social problems . . . I do see myself staying in here; I do see myself becoming a professor, I do want to teach.

Clearly, faculty serve as models for graduate students, as their behaviors indicate to graduate students whether or not they want to follow the path to the professoriate.

The Faculty Role Is What I Want

In spite of the challenges of a faculty career for students of color, several students expressed conviction about their career choice. Race was not considered the only influence in their decision making about a career. Calistro, in engineering, saw that his engineering professors were engaged in grant writing in order to secure funding for research. He both understood and accepted this as part of a faculty role in a research university:

> I expect to be writing proposals trying to get money, doing networking, trying to build some sort of collaboration with other professors or industry to support my research and students and also of course, advising and there is of course teaching. If I am teaching at a university that is like a research institution, I know that it is something I am going to have work on.

This fit with his ambition and expectations as a faculty member, and also in the teaching function, which is not often a primary interest of a research university faculty member in engineering; this had considerable appeal to him, with the implication that race/ethnicity was influential:

> I don't want to make that like a secondary objective . . . to anything else that I am doing. I want to be a good instructor especially because I also know that I want to be an inspiration to some students who maybe don't have anyone else that they can relate to.

For Sarah, in the sciences, it was the pursuit of knowledge through an academic career that shaped her decision for a faculty career, and graduate school had not dissuaded her from this path:

> I guess the reason I ended up going to grad school and wanting to be a professor is that I have raised some questions that I'd like to answer that I don't think I can answer in any other career; just for my own knowledge and interest.

Rebecca, in the humanities, viewed her professors as both engaged and caring, and thus she assumed that her future in academia, as previously noted, would be as satisfying: "It's not a cut-throat department." In Rebecca's case, as in the others who were selecting an academic career, there was a condition of assonance between what they experienced and saw in graduate school and what they imagined or assumed to be in a future faculty career. Their initial decision to pursue a faculty career was reinforced by their experiences in a graduate program. The professional identity they viewed within their own program faculty was aligned with their self-concept, projected into the future. These graduate students, however, were in the minority.

Assonance and Dissonance

Both assonance and dissonance were evident in these students' career choices and imagined futures. Andria, in engineering, demonstrated both conditions of assonance and dissonance.

Her supervisor not only guided her through the doctoral process but also served as a role model for her. Yet her role as a mother was not compatible with what she understood as the work and obligations of a university professor. Although she was able to navigate graduate school as a result of her supervisor's efforts, Andria's social identity—a single mother—mitigated against a career choice as a university professor.

A male graduate student in science who is African American, Darius, reflected upon his limited interactions with others in his research work:

> I sit in a lab where half the lab is my advisor and half the lab is another advisor. That other advisor is always there. My advisor is an administrator and I've seen him in the lab one time, maybe twice in the last 2 years.

Darius's social life and personal relationships existed outside his graduate program. That is, his social identity was detached from his academic work and identity: "I kind of take myself out of the lab so I can socialize and then go back into the lab when I need to work." For Darius, social identity was not consonant with his graduate student role and with the future role of a research university professor. Shakina, a science student, offered a combination of perceptions, elucidating some of the problems of difference and dissonance for graduate students of color at the university.

> I think a lot of faculty do want to change things and they . . . got busy and got more focused in increasing their publications and getting to tenure . . . and just forgot that they are also at a teaching facility.

Although she acknowledged that the faculty were attempting to take steps to improve mentoring of graduate students, and had intentions to help students locate positions and give them career advice, she was aware that faculty were institutionalized into a pattern of behaviors (Scott, 2001) that does not lead to the guiding of their graduate students. Yet despite faculty efforts and intentions, racial issues trump, as Shakina noted: "It is just that race thing is always there." For Shakina, the truth was that racism is present, an observation consistent with the scholarly literature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001): Her program was enmeshed in a social and institutional environment that critical race theorists (Diggs et al., 2009) would acknowledge as racist.

For Carl, it was his experiences prior to graduate school and the absence of African American role models that steered him away from a teaching career in postsecondary education. His experiences provided salient examples of inequality within institutions (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and the suggestion of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For Carl, as for others, social identity and a faculty career are discordant.

Researcher Effects and Limitations

Although in qualitative, interpretive field-methods research, the researcher is the instrument for data collection, and subjectivity and positionality cannot be overcome entirely (J. Mason, 2002); there are limitations to what can be concluded in qualitative field-methods research, whether about a single site or other similar sites. In our investigation, we were mindful that two of the principal investigators who conducted the majority of interviews with graduate students of color were both White females and university faculty. Thus, status and race/ethnicity differentials could reasonably be expected to influence the self-representations and performance of interviewees (Labov, 1999). The use of CRT and SIT in this investigation may have diminished researcher effects, as would the conversational style of interviewing carried out by the principal researchers. However, we suggest that the information and claims provided by the students are their subjective responses to an institutional context and should be understood in the context in which their experiences were articulated (Goffman, 1959). That context includes not only the interview context but also the research extensive university, the disciplinary or professional graduate program, the students' minority status, and, in most cases, a gendered and racialized educational and social environment (Romero, 1997).

Conclusions

Graduate students were socialized to a career in the academy, particularly to research universities. In their career choices or aspirations, these graduate students were influenced both by the behaviors of their professors and their own social identities. Graduate student career choices were often not consonant with the ex-

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pectations of their professors (i.e., to be faculty). Students' social identity and states of assonance or dissonance shaped these career choices.

This investigation underscores that graduate students' professional and social identity alignment is a significant condition for decisions about academic career choices. The concepts of assonance and dissonance are particularly pertinent in explaining the experiences and behaviors of graduate students of color. The case of women of color suggests inherent dissonance because of both race and gender: Race makes them an anomaly in many graduate programs in the academy, and gender places them in an out-group in these programs in which gender identity is not consonant with the dominant and accepted identity of professors in the field. That they will pursue an academic career is in large part dependent upon the extent to which they are sustained by chance, for example, meeting a role model who inspired them to continue in their path to the professoriate.

Race, consistent with CRT, functions to sensitize graduate students of color both to difference and, because of their high-level minority status in a graduate program, to their isolation. This difference pertains to students' social identity, including background experiences framed by race (e.g., segregation, lack of teachers and faculty of color), values (e.g., giving back to the community), and group identity for a positive self-concept. The taken-for-granted assumptions of graduate programs, promulgated by faculty, for example, that a faculty role has specific characteristics (e.g., research and grant writing) and that faculty prioritize their work ahead of family or community, are not always acceptable to graduate students of color. Furthermore, the deeply embedded patterns of behavior of faculty do not necessarily mesh with the needs of graduate students of color.

Recent research on social class and graduate students' career aspirations (Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011) suggests that a sense of belonging or not belonging is the critical variable for students from poor or working-class backgrounds in their aspirations for a faculty position in what the authors deem "top research universities" (p. 765). Race, according to Ostrove et al., is not significant, in contrast to the present study and to the tenets of CRT. Perhaps differing methodologies contribute to different findings, as theirs was quantitative, based upon a survey and survey data. This present research addressed graduate students of color and their graduate experiences and career choices within the context of the dearth of faculty of color in the academy generally, not just at top research universities. The problem of the dearth of faculty of color is not simply associated with research universities. At the community college, the proportion of community college faculty who are categorized as minority is 22% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Graduate students do not aim exclusively for careers at research universities (M. A. Mason & Goulden, 2006), but aim for teaching-oriented institutions as well, and this is particularly the case for graduate students of color (Haley et al., in press).

The reasons for graduate students of color rejecting an academic career or a specific type of academic career (i.e., research university) have been clarified at one research university. The implications for graduate programs and graduate students of color can be seen in two pathways originating in theory. One pathway follows institutional theory, and requires that universities (and specifically graduate programs) adjust their norms to become more aware of social identities of their students, including greater attention to family friendly environments and acceptance of work–life balance (see O'Meara & Campbell, 2011; Quinn, 2011; Quinn & Litzler, 2009). Thus, if universities and colleges expect to hire larger numbers of academics classified as faculty of color, then the graduate research programs that prepare these students must alter their practices and norms so that graduate students experience assonance, not dissonance, with their program's practices and with the projected profession for which they are educated and trained.

The second pathway follows CRT, and concedes that the academy may not be an environment conducive to social identities centered upon race/ethnicity. Although CRT lacks a vision of potential for change in a predominantly White institution, or in institutions or units in which there is an embedded White majority environment, it does provide a perspective on the deleterious conditions for graduate students of color. For functionalists, this knowledge can lead to actions that may ameliorate these conditions. CRT does push practitioners and schol-

ars to consider more than gender or class (i.e., socioeconomic status) in institutional practices aimed at graduate students, and sensitizes both groups to the significance of race/ethnicity. CRT, however, does not account for intersections of race with other major categories, such as gender, class, age, and citizenship or immigrant status, which may be pertinent for graduate students' experiences and career choices. Indeed, future research on graduate students of color that focuses upon these intersectionalities may determine that one category is more emblematic of oppression than another (Collins, 2000) and yet explain that one category examined alone may be problematical (McCall, 2005).

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